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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR BK IZ

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: DEFENSE MINISTER POSITIVE ON WIDER COALITION DEPLOYMENTS BUT VAGUE ON SPECIFICS

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. Minister of Defense Selmo Cikotic told the Ambassador that he remains committed to exploring options for expanded Bosnian coalition deployments in the coming year. Cikotic said that he would focus the ministry and military on developing further niche capable units, with an eye towards deploying to Afghanistan. Regarding broad proposals for the Bosnian Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit in Iraq to undertake counter-Improvised Explosive Ordnance (c-IED) missions, Cikotic was less sanguine than he had been previously, telling the Ambassador that the risk associated with such a mission might draw resistance from political and military leaders. End Summary.

¶2. (S) The Ambassador met with Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic June 18 to discuss Bosnia's coalition deployments, and possibilities for augmenting contributions to Iraq. Cikotic again asserted his broad support for such missions, and told the Ambassador that one of his highest priorities remained the development of niche capable units in the new Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, Cikotic said that he was particularly focused on developing a deployable military police and intelligence capacity that could possibly support coalition efforts in Afghanistan. Cikotic said that he hoped to have some additional capacities within the next year that could be offered to NATO and other international partners for deployment overseas (Comment: The Bosnian Armed Forces has just begun the process of standing-up the units Cikotic mentioned, and will rely on substantial USG security assistance to train and outfit the units. A one-year timeline for their deployment might be overly optimistic. End Comment).

¶3. (S) Regarding Iraq missions specifically, the Ambassador asked whether Cikotic had any further thoughts on the EOD unit assuming a c-IED function for future rotations. Cikotic, acknowledging that he had discussed the issue at both the April Coalition Conference in Tampa and during his May visit to Iraq, voiced greater hesitation than he had previously in accepting such a mission. Cikotic said that senior military leaders had expressed "serious reluctance" over such a mission due to the heightened risk. Cikotic further stated that he now believed a c-IED component would fundamentally alter the EOD mission, and would require

approval by the Council of Ministers, the Presidency, and Parliament. (Note: This is a change from the position Cikotic had earlier articulated. As recently as three weeks ago, he had indicated that he believed it possible to consider the c-IED function as a part of the existing mission. End Note.)

Cikotic said he would anticipate serious political obstacles at all these levels, though refused to explicitly state from where he thought opposition might arise. When pressed on options for c-IED training, Cikotic said his preference would be for any training to occur in Bosnia, with outside trainers training both the unit and Bosnian trainers for future rotations. Cikotic said that his opinion was that the Ministry of Defense should be looking for deployments of "medium risk," somewhere between the simple EOD duties and a c-IED mission.

¶4. (S) Comment. Cikotic's assertion that the senior military leadership might oppose a c-IED mission as too risky rings hollow. Our numerous discussions with CHOD LtGen Sifet Podzic and his senior deputies indicate that any resistance from the military side on deployments is logistical, considering that the Armed Forces remain in the process of filling out their new force structure. In all likelihood, Cikotic has faced political pressure on the issue, probably from President Haris Silajdzic who visited Iraq with the Defense Minister and received briefings on the c-IED mission.

Cikotic's backtracking from earlier commitments on the c-IED mission does indicate that it could be a political issue, and, if a request for the mission is made, it will have to be handled delicately. Our position remains that the c-IED mission should not be treated as a new deployment, but rather a continuation of the EOD mission. We await further information on the parameters of the c-IED mission to continue our discussions at the political level. End Comment.

MCELHANEY